FINE ART AND COMMERCIAL ARCHITECTURE
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The question used to be whether architecture, whether a building, could accommodate art or not. It used to be whether architecture and art were compatible. This is no longer the question. The reality now is that all known architecture is a mortal enemy of the best art. This generalization applies to the rest of the society as well; architecture is an enemy of the people. It's not a sufficient excuse that the people are willing to be fooled. This conflict, though, is minor compared with the overwhelming construction everywhere, which has little to do with acknowledged architecture and art. This vast, thoughtless quantity, as in politics, is the context for the small achievement of architecture and art in this century, which, taken out of context, seems glorious. The only architect to ameliorate the vast commercial construction was Mies van der Rohe. Afterward the blind commercial construction influenced the reputed architecture of the architectural magazines. Architecture joined commercial construction; art for a while remained art.

The present architecture exploits art in at least two ways. It takes forms and the use of materials from past and present art, as well as from past architecture, especially, even more meanly, in building museums. Secondly, the exhibition of art, which is the reason to build museums, is a practicality ignored by architects and evidently by those who commission them. Architecture is supposed to have a function and the function of a museum is to exhibit art. A building without a function is ridiculous, an expensive frivolity. The less the function, the more extravagant the building; formlessness follows dysfunction.

The derivation from previous art and architecture is a consequence of the industrial revolution, as in part those with power and money refuse to acknowledge the source of these and so refuse the society. They wanted, often still want, to appear to be the previous owners of agriculture. Derivation was rejected by many architects of this century, who sensibly

wanted a new architecture for a new time, an industrial society which is still only beginning, but which is beginning increasingly, drastically badly. The industrial society is replacing the agricultural society. This is the only revolution. A new society is forming, mostly by disastrous accretion. If nothing is done to introduce thought it will become larger and larger and more and more primitive until nature and war cause it to start over. But the industrial society will continue; this is only the first two hundred years. The derivative architecture of the nineteenth century was at least well made and seriously intended, except as to the latter for Victorian extremes. The present reintroduction of derivation is highly reactionary, as suits the politics of the last twenty years, and in its imposition on the public, its isolation and tokenism, its assertion of status, power, and money, its appropriation of the past as status, its claim to superiority, in its failure to understand either the past or the present, which degenerates into generality, it is fascist. It's not chance that much of the fascist architecture, especially including that in the United States, of the 1920s and 1930s, was the architecture of museums. As I wrote once there is little difference between the old National Gallery of the United States and the new one by I. M. Pei. The purpose is the same, to show the power of the central government dignified by culture. The different and dissenting but acclaimed art is appropriated. This uneasy hypocrisy produces bad architecture. The new museum by Hans Hollein in Frankfurt is highly fascist in its external appearance – I haven't been inside since animals tend to avoid pain. Hollein's museum is bland and cute. Gustav Peichl's new Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn, very general and bland, big and sightless, as in the 1930s, is in style fascist, neofascist. The references I remember on the exterior of Hollein's building form a bizarre collection of Classical, German farmhouse, and Romanesque architecture, all schematized within general rectangles, cute and bland, tokens and symbols, liberalism become exploitative and cynical.

Avoiding pain, I refused to go again to Hollein's museum in Mönchengladbach when a friend had a show there. I avoid The Museum of Modern Art in New York, an originating source of power as style, now also the backside of M. Pompidou, the industrial hero. Hollein's new building near St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna should be destroyed, as it will be, as now a few people wish to destroy the complicated concrete architecture of the 1960s begun by Paul Rudolph, the brute in brutalism. The mistakes and the lack of accumulation of good architecture waste a lot of money and effort, which as always come from everyone. The corporate Guggenheim now wants the city of Salzburg to finance another museum by Hollein, for one hundred million dollars, derived from the Guggenheim Museum in New York. I think Mario Botta's new museum in San Francisco, which looks stupid as a model, also will cost one hundred million. The Guggenheim Corporation is also talking the city of Bilbao into a museum by Frank Gehry, for over a hundred million. A hundredth of this to a couple of good artists would do infinitely more; the discrepancy is enormous. The main source of the cute and decorative aspect is in commercial architecture, especially that of the highway strips praised by Venturi – it's hard to designate the worst architect – and in the cheap renovation of old hotels and office buildings. An appearance of cheapness pretending to be expensive, as it is, has been continued with the style. Most new buildings look flimsy, look cheap, and are badly built; for example, James Stirling's museum in Stuttgart, decorated fashionably and pretentiously with colored railings, a cute boutique. Cuteness also is because the derivation is very distant from its source. In the center of Brussels several new apartment houses and offices are being built. These seem to be meant to fit in with the old houses nearby, some of which were probably demolished for the new ones. The imitation is very distant. In Santa Monica or El Paso there is an imitation Disneyland with a "Belgian Village." The new houses in Brussels seem to be an imitation of those

in the "Belgian Village," generalized, modernized, and just as cute. Across the square in imitation of the AT&T building in New York an office building is crowned with a Gothic steeple made of aluminum beams. In Switzerland next to the fine old farmhouses there are apartment houses imitating distantly Swiss farmhouses. As to the "clients," ten years ago a businessman in Houston responsible for several of its skyscrapers told me that he never looked at the plans of the architects. He just told them to go ahead. That is the zero motive, to talk like George Bush, who said recently, "Never has an issue been more demagogued by its opponents." This ignorance is relevant to the situation in architecture. It's obvious that derivation in architecture, or art, isn't a new freedom, as it's claimed to be, but is ignorance and cynicism and so is closure, repression. A large office building in Dallas imitates a small old New Orleans house with cast-iron decoration. This absurdity is by Philip Johnson who, after Venturi, popularized derivation. It's impossible to guess the ultimate attitude behind this building. Maybe he is just demagoguing. Johnson's frequent cynical remarks even seem insufficient. Cynicism is a large factor in recent architecture. Johnson, all of the cynical architects, seem convinced that opportunism and cynicism will do the job, that it will seem sophisticated and realistic and keep them in business. Johnson thinks that the client will recognize him as a fellow hard-nosed businessman. This attitude is obviously destructive, but it is also naive. It doesn't allow for the enormity of the present and of the future, for the unknown, for condemnation by those uninterested in a joke in Dallas. People are not a lovable bunch but the attitude and the building are insulting to them, blasphemous toward them, as the destruction of nature is toward the world.

Architects are touchy about whether they are making art or not. At a conference in Santa Monica several years ago Cesar Pelli was very concerned that his architecture be considered art. This is an ambiguity of European usage. As one of "the arts," architecture is an art. Visual art is another "art," but in ordinary usage in North America art is painting and sculpture. Function and a necessarily public use partly define architecture. It's a big and elementary mistake to try to turn architecture into art, into sculpture. Almost all public buildings built as status symbols – museums, concert halls, Olympic buildings, fairs, airports, hotels – pretend to be sculpture, to be "creative," "individual," "imaginative," "unique," all that art is supposed to be. A building as a sculpture is a bad idea to begin with, but architects know very little about the recent history of sculpture. The derivation is so ignorant that it would never occur in first-rate art. Old forms that are considered finished by first-rate artists are revived by architects as if there is no history, as if sculpture has no meaning. An office building in Dallas by Henry Cobb, which is fairly well made, which is unusual, is an example of architecture as sculpture. Two enormous, vertical, tapering forms partially cross. Typically, contravening architecture, the exterior is unopened and the interior unknown. This is a very large version of a type of large sculpture which in the 1930s was small and particular. The large sculpture has always been generalized and bland. It's the type which is usually in the plaza in front of a skyscraper, that has always been obsolete and insufficient, that need never to have been made. Some of Tony Smith's sculpture is like this. Clement Meadmore's work is the best, or worst, example. Peter Eisenman's architecture is the most derivative from art. Twenty years ago his houses were designed from De Stijl, built long after the forms and colors were finished among first-rate artists. His recent art school, the Wexner Center for the Arts, in Columbus, Ohio, seems from photographs to combine this with a recent derivation from Sol LeWitt, a bad choice. A project for Cleveland was elaborately "conceptual," and banal. These incompatible styles are justified by dense double-talk. These are whole buildings, mostly nonfunctional, difficult to build, and expensive because of the architecture and because of the destruction of

the previous buildings. The art school is an insult to the beginning artists who study there.

An early principle of modern architecture was to not have decoration, which was a conspicuous aspect of eclectic Victorian architecture. This principle was maintained by Mies van der Rohe, the last architect capable of elegance in a traditional sense, and Louis Kahn. Before their deaths some furniture, especially Italian furniture, the worst, had been turned into decoration, so that the principle of no applied decoration was observed, but the intent was subverted, which is one of the main techniques of this century. After Kahn all furniture and most buildings became decoration. A building by Hans Hollein, Michael Graves, Peter Eisenman, Frank Gehry, almost all of the internationally known architects, is a huge decoration. The exceptions are conventional architects such as Ed Barnes and Arthur Erickson, dull, bland misfortunes themselves. I don't go to Asia Society in New York because of the architecture and because of the better buildings which were torn down. The building as decoration conflicts with everything, certainly art, which is not decoration. How can you work inside of a decoration? How can art survive inside of a decoration? How can anything be understood? Tadao Ando's new company headquarters in Osaka is also somewhat a large decorative sculpture, typically complicated, but plain in part, which is unusual now. Wild complication and a horror vacui beyond explanation is normal. A social explanation is that the rich are always new and need crowded and complicated houses, office complexes, and corporate headquarters. This decoration and complication is as extreme as the worst Victorian architecture, as the worst and most incomprehensible, overstuffed, claustrophobic, Victorian interiors.

The best art and the worst architecture are completely opposed. Unlike most of the situations of art and architecture in the past, in which they could be distant enemies, the constant construction of museums of art, the worst of the worst, makes architecture for an artist a daily enemy. You can say that this isn't architecture, which it isn't, that it's the same as the sleaziest commercial construction, but this doesn't help. Almost all of the museums of Europe and North America of the last decade are offensive. The attitudes and purposes which result in museums are not those which result in the art which they contain. An analysis of the two sides would be a book of analysis of the society, but, quickly, the most conspicuous aspect is stupidity: the car doesn't run because the motor is in the middle for symbolism and the wheels are on top for panache. Secondly, all museums and most buildings designed by architects assert status, power, and money. It's impossible to take these seriously. For art these are childish matters. And anyway in the present those in power with money cannot intelligently assert status. They don't understand the context. This ambiguity shows in the cuteness, the coyness, the archness, the flirtatiousness, the snobbishness of the buildings. You can argue that in contrast to a committee of businesspeople a government is more powerful than individuals, which it is, and that its status is real, but governments don't understand the context either. They express status in highways, bombs, and airplanes for presidents. In designing buildings they are caught in their demagoguery. How can you express superiority in government buildings and also be a democratic government of the people? How can you build a museum to educate the public in art that is superior to the public? Or to art? You have to be cute like Ronald Reagan, a liar like Bush. Prior to this superficiality is the fact that there are no really public institutions, made cooperatively by the public, desired by the public, or at least intelligently conceded by the public as necessities of civilization, as science laboratories have to be, and possibly "museums" of contemporary art. If the society wants these activities, if it seriously claims to be civilized, instead of just boasting of tokens as now, it has to provide the money necessary and with that not the ignorant control it increasingly wants,

but the necessary freedom. Science that is not free will become only the technology of an industrial society organized medievally. This time, after being free, there will be no good art. It's happening.

The main reason for superficiality is that everything is dominated by a central government that has negated democracy and that this must be concealed since the excuse for the central government is the good of the people determined by the people, when the real reason for the structure is the good of the government. Therefore give the public a smile and a wave and cheat them in the Oval Office. The museums must express status, but they can't do it seriously. They don't have it and it would seem undemocratic. The situation is so far from honest that they can't begin to have the moderate and relatively nonsocial status that comes from being the state of knowledge at a particular time. The museum isn't the best building that can be built containing the best art because that idea of practical seriousness is nearly unknown among those involved in art. The integrity of the best art being done is acknowledged by almost no one. Most of the many involved in art are using it in a variety of destructive and irrelevant ways; there are too many users. My grandmother in Missouri used to say that there were too many chiefs and too few Indians.

Museums claim to be the way they are because they are educating the public in art, a public that is ignorant. But who teaches reading by becoming illiterate? The reasonable assumption that the public is ignorant is built into the style of the museum. The assumed superiority of the museum, which is doubtful, its patronizing attitude, shows in the architecture. And again, eventually the public is large and unknown and it is presumptuous to use its nature, as Venturi and Johnson do, as a justification for a style of architecture. It's demagoguery to claim to know what the people want. The claimant always claims for their own purposes. Evidently it's assumed that the public will not come to the museum without some familiar kitsch as a guide. The imitation of entertainment labyrinths is supposed to entice the public. But the confined and convoluted space is oppressive. Usually you are instantly lost. The best example of this is in the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Seoul. Near the entrance, after a short flight of stairs, you are lost. It's an achievement. Also, as an example, the stairs are polished granite and slippery, while the adjacent walls are sawn granite and rough, which is a typical impracticality and perversity of materials. Here, everywhere, rooms either have ceilings that are too low to install art well or are so high that the work is lost. Every museum has to have a large hall, as in Pei's museum in Washington, like the lobby of a new hotel, guaranteed to dwarf art. The spaces in museums are never simple and never free of extra doors and windows, electrical outlets, machinery, junk. There is seldom natural light and often, as in Bern, the ceiling is the architecture, the last surface of extravagance indoors. This romanticizing of industrial construction is alien to art. So is the domestic carpet on most floors. So are all of the references planned to keep the museum personnel and the public from getting socially lost, stranded among unidentifiable art. I don't want my work to become part of the overstuffed fake elegance of the upper class; I don't want it to sit on the gray middle-class wall-to-wall carpet; I don't want to join the lower class either, who want only social realism, as does everyone else. All of the references are obvious to most artists, who have worked their way through the clichés of the society. Why impose them on an art which has escaped them? Why can't the space and the materials agree with the attitudes of the art? Ignorance can't contain knowledge. It's even argued that museums are primarily for education in art and not primarily for art. This is an absurdity and a serious denial of the integrity of art. Should art always be subordinate to its own teaching? That is stasis. Older buildings that I've shown work in have far better plans and rooms and some civic dignity, for example the museums

in Eindhoven and Baden-Baden and the Museum für angewandte Kunst in Vienna.

The bad design of the museums teaches bad design. The public, including students, are bound to see the style of a building as an authority, if only an authority suggesting cynicism. Frank Gehry's building for Vitra says, don't take the furniture shown too seriously. Don't take anything seriously. Have fun, as he defines fun. This is the architect for a hundred-million-dollar museum in Bilbao, as I mentioned. The Guggenheim Corporation's CEO, Thomas Krens, says: "We want to provide a cultural identity for Bilbao." This is arrogant and condescending. It wipes out art and Bilbao at once, as if the first is a product and the second a boomtown. The corporate Guggenheim is selling identity abroad, which conspicuously it itself does not have. This is the use of art, and of the public, and of the public's money. What are students of furniture design to think of Vitra? The building negates all of the good furniture within it. The building is a jumble of the dead sculpture mentioned earlier, trite and dead. The entrance is a jumble. The furniture is hung on the walls, "skyed," like paintings in a Victorian museum. When I went there the furniture of Erich Dieckmann was shown on high platforms tilted toward the viewer. None of the furniture is shown as furniture. It's all part of Gehry's banal decorative sculpture. This can't even be education. Gehry and Eisenman argued in Santa Monica that conflict between the architecture of a museum and the art that it contains is good, that this is a dialogue. It's only aggression, only confusion, only failure, as all violent conflict is.

The architecture of corporate headquarters cannot be serious because all very large corporations are exploitative. The architecture of central governments has to be duplicitous for the same reason. That of states and cities cannot be serious because their apparent power is not real. Architecture for the public, including museums, fails because there is no civic agreement, no public space, in the United States, no politics at all. The people haven't been allowed to do anything, even disagree. The contemporary museum is new and dubious. There is sufficient agreement to finance the building as a cultural symbol but no opinion as to the reality. Museums are expensively proliferating in a new society without anyone having thought much about their purpose. They may be a harmful institution. They tend to be a tentative institution for the powerful central institutions, so far without much of their own art. There are artists willing to provide this art, as there are architects. Once both serve the central government and corporate capitalism, there will be a universal version of social realism, which will be no better than wedding-cake architecture and the statues of Lenin that are coming down. These institutions cannot make good art and architecture, just as religion could not after the rejection of belief by the best intellectuals. First-rate art, art that artists believe in, art that is credible now, art that the future will believe was credible now, is placed in incredible buildings that it is easy to see their architects don't believe in.

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